

**first  
steps**

Women's Centre  
Support. Educate. Empower.

# Annual Report 2020 - 2021



**First Steps Women's Centre Board of Directors 2020-21**

Chair	Louise Mallon
Vice Chair	Katalin Hajdu
Treasurer	Katalin Hajdu
Secretary	Maria McGilly
Director	Helen O'Donnell
Director	Paula Smyth
Director	Geraldine McAuley
Director	Edel Cunningham
Director	Wendy Wigton
Director	Mary O'Neill
Director	Siobhan Wallace
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# Contents

Welcome and Chairperson's Report	3
CEO Report	4
Life Skills	6
Information Technology	10
Health & Wellbeing	12
Childcare	14
Information Officer	16
Benefit Checker	18
New Logo Design	19
Covid-19 Community Survey Jan-Feb 2021	20
Volunteering	21
Crafty Young Things	21
Annual Accounts	22
Funders	24



## Eileen Fitzgerald



*In February this year First Steps Women's Centre lost one of its most passionate and dedicated supporters. Our beloved friend and fellow Director Eileen Fitzgerald lost her battle against cancer. Eileen was on the Board at First Steps Women's Centre for 8 years. She had been Treasurer for the past four. Eileen was a very dedicated, sincere and loving person. She had FSWC very much in her heart. She loved to hear what was going on at the Centre. She took immense pride in seeing the growth, the continued improvements with the programmes and the sheer transformation that the renovation and refurbishment had brought. Eileen loved to attend many of the events and celebrations at the Centre. She was a wonderful woman, strong willed and a real fighter. She will be sadly missed but her memory and her love for all things at First Steps Women's Centre will remain with us all. We extend our sympathy to her family and friends.*

***Louise Mallon, Chairperson***

# Chair's Report

*Louise Mallon, Chairperson*

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This is my first year as Chair of First Steps Women's Centre. I have been on the Board of FSWC since 2018. This year will no doubt be remembered across the world as the 'Year of the Pandemic'; the year of COVID-19, the year of Lockdowns, working from home, and the year of massive challenges and upheavals. It seems that the whole world came to a complete standstill; offices empty, streets deserted, with towns and cities desolate. It seemed that the world had begun to resemble a scene from a science fiction movie. How our lives were turned upside down! The rise and fall of infections, and then a second wave with more infections have brought a lot of pressure on families, brought poverty and job loss to many homes, and exacerbated despair to many, many families across the world.

You may ask what can a small organisation like First Steps Women's Centre do to combat a global pandemic?! This report will highlight and showcase the determination, dedication and ingenuity of staff, volunteers, tutors and Board Members in doing their bit, providing the training, education and support services. We still managed to provide a bit of laughter, shelter, comfort and normality in this topsy-turvy world. This report will not dwell on comparisons or statistics between this year and previous years; however, it will acknowledge the willpower of those women determined to continue with their studies in the face of surmounting adversity. It will showcase the fact that, with implementing a robust hygiene system, including social distancing, and the implementation of other safe systems of working, FSWC managed to remain Covid free. That in itself is a real blessing. Albeit with reduced numbers but much, much more work for staff and volunteers. This included the complete sterilisation of all creche toys and equipment after each session, the complete wipe down of all training rooms between classes, and taking the temperature of everyone who entered the Centre.

Martin Luther King once said, "the ultimate measure of a person is not where they stand in moments of comfort and convenience, but where they stand at times of challenge and controversy".

FSWC stood up and faced the challenge. Please flick through the annual report. Read the testimonies of those women who availed of the programmes and courses, of those women and families who were helped through our Benefit Checker service. This

is some of the evidence of the work continuing in the face of a highly contagious disease. A real and present danger.

## *Our Vision is*

*"Confident women empowered to participate in and influence society".*

## *Our Mission of*

*"supporting women's professional and personal development through education and training".*

I believe that during these past 12 months FSWC really showcased its values. Our values state:

- **We value integrity, honesty and recognise our unique contribution** - FSWC maintained its role within the community as the only Women's Centre in the area. Our Centre is a safe haven, a safe space and a place for women to have some "me time". This is still the case. During the past 12 months, staff and volunteers have been phoning, texting, emailing and visiting women and their families to offer support, encouragement, and to be a listening ear.
- **We welcome all equally** - Our ethos has always been an open door to all women. We continue to work with multiple nationalities. This year has been no different.
- **We value accountability and promote quality through continued reflection and improvement** - FSWC embarked on a 4-month Director Recruitment in which 6 new women were appointed. The new Directors received a full induction, with some also attending Governance and Safeguarding training.
- **We use a person-centred approach, realising individual potential** - This is still the case, whether face-to-face, via email or Zoom. FSWC is very much geared to being a person-centred organisation.

During the past 12 months, FSWC provided 263 places for women across 38 different courses. The Centre managed to provide all IT programmes online, via Zoom technology. Tr@inIT, an amazing IT training company, provided all staff and tutors with training on Zoom last summer. This enabled

# Chief Executive's Report

Michael McGoldrick, Chief Executive

FSWC to put together plans in the event of a second lockdown. By December 2020, the second lockdown was inevitable. FSWC had made plans for a second lockdown. These were implemented with much success from January 2021. These were still in place by the end of the financial year.

Core funding from the European Social Fund (ESF), Department for Communities and Department for Economy, continue to be the main source of income to FSWC. However, our Board are aware that the ESF programme will end in March 2022. There will be an opportunity to apply under Round 3 of the ESF programme. This will be a minimum of 1 year, and probably no more than 2 years, depending on available budgets.

I would like to thank all of the funders, the Board, the participants, the volunteers, the tutors and the staff who have made the Centre a place of welcome, a place to make friends, a place to learn, a place to gain confidence, and a place to tell others about. First Steps Women's Centre is a centre in the heart of the community for the community.

Louise Mallon

## Thank You to all Tutors at First Steps Women's Centre

FSWC has been open since 1998. It has grown into a much bigger organisation since those early days. However, one of the main ingredients for the continued success of our programmes is the dedication and professionalism of our tutors. Each and every tutor has gone above and beyond their role. The tutors encompass our Vision, Mission and Values. They have always went that extra mile with students, spent time with them and showed a genuine care for the success and wellbeing of each one. This year our tutors have had to adapt to new ways of delivering training - for many of them using Zoom for teaching purposes for the first time ever. FSWC would like all our tutors for their hard work over the year, providing support to our participants during a particularly difficult time, enabling them to achieve their personal goals, learn new skills, grow in confidence and complete courses. Many of our students have stated that "The Tutor makes the Course" and this is so true. Thank you each and every tutor for being part of our Team at First Steps Women's Centre.

When I wrote my report for last year I stated the following,

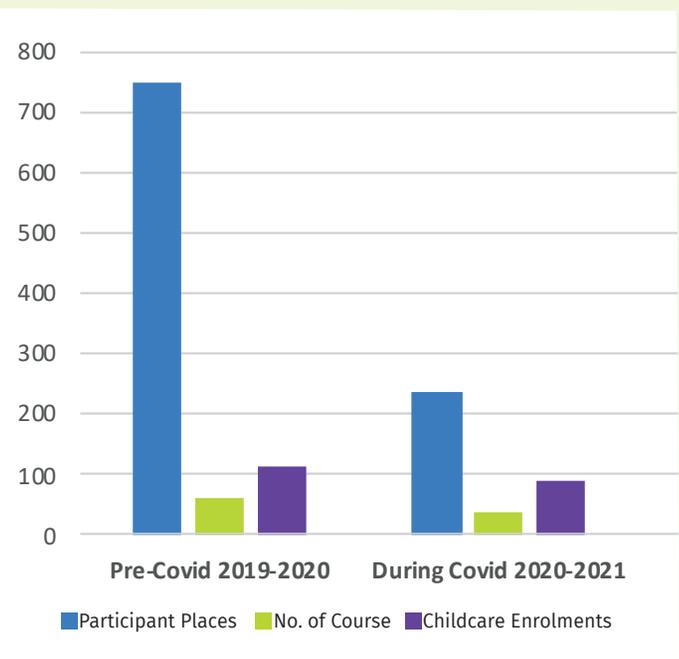
*"As I write this report it seems that the Coronavirus is beginning to subside. No one knows for sure what the long-term implications and outcomes will be. The one thing I do know is that there will be many more women and their families who will need the help and assistance of FSWC."*

At this stage, we are still unsure of the short or long term implications. What I do know is that the staff, volunteers and tutors all worked together to provide 38 different courses, providing 263 places. The pandemic has greatly reduced the capacity of programmes and courses at FSWC. At the same time, additional pressures have been put on women and their families due to lockdown, home-schooling and a shortage of resources.

The table below shows a snapshot of how the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted on the numbers attending the Centre.

Staff returned to office based working in in July after a 4-month stint of working from home and immediately began to recruit for the autumn programme as normal. However additional contingency plans were also made in case of a second wave.

## Comparison of Impact of Covid-19 2019-2021



**Health & Safety** - The health and safety of everyone who attends FSWC, either as a participant, tutor, child, visitor, staff or volunteer, took on an additional level when the doors reopened in July 2020. Social distancing, hand sanitising, temperature assessments of every person seeking to enter FSWC, and additional cleaning and sterilising were introduced. This added to the daily workload of all staff and volunteers, but, from July to December 2020, FSWC managed to keep COVID-19 at bay.

The rapid rise and spread of Covid-19 infections during December 2020 and January 2021 meant that FSWC had to go back into Lockdown mode. FSWC was much more prepared. All tutors, staff and volunteers had received training using Zoom technology. When the decision to go into Lockdown was made, all courses went online with very few hitches.

**Investing in Staff & Volunteers** - FSWC considers itself to be a Centre of Excellence for both the students and children, as well as the staff and volunteers. During the past year, staff completed 89 training courses ranging from Level 5 Childcare Learning & Development to Paediatric First Aid, Excel, Microsoft Word, Health, Wellbeing and other IT courses.

**Online Survey** - A massive Online survey was carried out over a 4 week period between January and February this year. The aim was to assess and gauge the impact of the Pandemic on the local community as well as surveying the demand and need within the Mid Ulster community. FSWC received 369 replies, including 70 from migrant people. Of those who completed the survey, 50% had been at the Centre before. This helped give a balanced view from users and non-users alike. The main findings are collated in page 15 of this annual report; however, a number of points can be highlighted here. They include: the high demand for a counselling service, the continuation of our Benefit Checker service, and the development of a higher level of programmes and courses at FSWC.

**Strategy** - The data from the survey has shown and highlighted a number of needs within the community. These include requests for more youth, family and men's initiatives. These are all very worthwhile causes; however, the Board within FSWC

has stated that its focus will remain on women. Some of our services are open to families and to men e.g. Benefit Checker Service. The Board of FSWC believe that it was given a mission and a vision that has still not been met. The Board feels that any veering off would dilute our services to the detriment of the original aims and objectives of First Steps Women's Centre. There is a strong belief that our core values, our aims, objectives, mission and vision should be the core work within FSWC. FSWC will also give support to any new groups and provide assistance in whatever manner it can.

**Ulster University and South West College** - During the past year, FSWC has developed stronger links with these two institutes of higher education. The University of Ulster has agreed to provide a Level 3 programme - Unlocking Potential - in autumn of 2021, whilst SW FE College hopes to provide a Level 2 programme.

**New Logo, Same First Steps Women's Centre** - Students from the University Ulster, through the Science Shop, redesigned FSWC's logo. The new logo creates a visual symbol that truly represents FSWC's vision.

**Funders** - I would like to thank, the European Social Fund, the Department for the Economy, the Department for Communities, Department for Health, Public Health Agency (through Clear Project), BBC Children In Need, Awards for All, Garfield Weston, 31st May 1961 Foundation, Halifax Foundation, The Pathway Fund, The American Ireland Fund, Mid Ulster Council and The Community Foundation NI for the funding awarded to First Steps Women's Centre. Without the funding, our staff, volunteers and tutors would not have been able to achieve the fantastic targets that they have reached.

**Thanks** - I would like to thank all the staff, Directors, tutors and volunteers who made this year a great year not only for the women but for the whole community.



**Michael McGoldrick**

# Life Skills

In the period April 2020 to March 2021 there were 282 places where the attendee accepted one or more places over 15 courses which included 13 ESOL Classes Speaking & Listening, Reading & Writing, 1 PRE-ESOL classes, 1 Essential Skills Class. Class sizes ranged from 16-18 in ESOL classes to 18 in Essential Skills.

There were a total of 157 qualifications/awards achieved with an overall pass rate of 80% This excluded Essential Skills as no exams were set due to the Coronavirus outbreak.

Table below shows Statistics for Retention

Class	Number Attended
EL1	88%
EL2	82%
EL3	90%
Level 1	88%
Pre-ESOL	71%
Improving English Skills	86%
<b>Overall</b>	<b>84%</b>

Whilst numbers attending were down on previous years the breadth of nationalities remained. New participants included Syrian, Bulgarian, and Indonesian and also from the Eastern European countries of Poland, Lithuania and Romania. Portuguese and Tetum (East Timor) students continue to be the main stakeholders of ESOL classes.



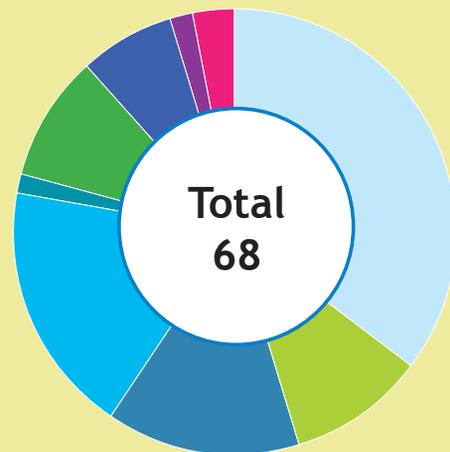
## English: Improving Your English Skills

There were 8 people studying for Improving English at Level 1 and 5 people studying who have achieved Level 2 Communication exams.

Improve your English skills is a non-accredited course for those who have already achieved qualifications or who seek to improve their existing skills. This year the class studied the book “To kill a Mockingbird”.

These two classes had an almost 100% attendance throughout the whole year i.e. at the Centre or via Zoom. Special credit and acknowledgement to course Tutor Michael Murphy for his continuing enthusiasm, passion and patience. Michael is a consummate professional with a passion and gift for teaching Literacy and English. FSWC believes that it is as important to offer students a learning opportunity without qualifications, with social interaction in a place where they feel confident and welcomed.

## Migrant Nationalities at end of March 2021



- Tetum 24 - 35%
- Lithuanian 7 - 10%
- Polish 10 - 14%
- Portuguese 12 - 18%
- Slovakian/Russian/Czech 1 - 1.5%
- Syrian 6 - 9%
- Indonesian 5 - 7%
- Romanian 1 - 1.5%
- Bulgarian 2 - 3%



### 2020-2021: The Year of Zooming

In January 2021, all Lifeskills classes moved to Zoom for the first time due to Lockdown circumstances. Zooming had the advantage of allowing classes to continue remotely each day as per the normal training plan. Students were able to use their existing technology at home to continue learning. All students were trained inhouse on how to access zoom prior to this event and it had the advantage of keeping students safe in their home environment whilst continuing to learn. Students were also given learning packages to use during their classes and to produce evidence if exams did not take place. Students are currently able to achieve and progress using the TAG process of Teacher based assessments. There are currently 20 students availing of this process.

However, for ESOL in particular some students did not feel that it was a good medium to learn a spoken language and students missed the social interaction that being in the centre allowed them to have. Zoom also had initial technical difficulties for some students. Students who found it difficult to access had limited IT skills, poor internet connectivity in for example rural areas, or due to lack of finance they did not have Internet, or access to computers, iPads or phones. As the schools were closed some mothers had ongoing commitments to home-schooling their children and those with small babies had no childcare facility. Some students

were also given more work commitments if they worked in a caring role or retail, or front-line roles. Without ongoing social interaction students felt that their confidence was waning as some felt lacking in confidence to speak over the zoom forum. Overall feedback from students was that Zoom was good but they preferred learning in a classroom setting and missed the social interaction that the centre provided.

### Lifeskills Qualifications ESOL

In 2020 to 2021 year 157 Qualifications were achieved. This represented an overall pass rate of 80%.

Due to the Coronavirus Pandemic and ongoing Covid Restrictions there were no exams held in 2020. In June 2020 a method of processing exams using Calculated Results was employed. This process used existing evidence, banked assessment results and teacher predicted grades to allow students to progress to the next level of learning if that would have occurred without the existence of the Pandemic.

This enabled students who needed the qualifications for education progression, gaining employment etc to achieve.

Exams Taken	Total Nos achieved	% Pass rate exam entrants
ESOL Entry Level 1 Speaking & Listening	22	79%
ESOL Entry Level 2 Speaking & Listening	11	92%
ESOL Entry Level 3 Speaking & Listening	16	94%
ESOL Level 1 Speaking & Listening	8	80%
ESOL Entry Level 1 Reading 2020	17	61%
ESOL Entry level 2 Reading 2020	11	92%
ESOL Entry level 3 Reading 2020	16	95%
ESOL Level 1 Reading 2020	10	100%
ESOL Entry Level 1 Writing 2020	18	64%
ESOL Entry Level 2 Writing 2020	10	83%
ESOL Entry Level 3 Writing 2020	13	77%
ESOL Level 1 Writing 2020	5	50%
<b>Total</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>80%</b>

# Life Skills Testimonials



## PRE-ESOL

*"I think this course is good for me and this course means everybody have opportunity to learn English"*

*"The strengths of this course because we start 7pm evening it's good thing"*

*"The strengths of this course class is the helpfulness"*

*"I can learn more about speaking and listening because we have practice speaking when we have every topic"*

## ESOL Entry Level 1

*"I can now speak and write about myself and family. I can write about my town and house."*

*"I like to meet other people, use the bus, and the women's centre"*

*"I like the women's centre to meet other people. Tutor is very good."*

*"I like to use the bus, childcare, tutors very good. I like the women's centre to meet other people."*

## ESOL Entry Level 2

*"I would like to study more speaking. I like to learn with vocabulary and dictionary."*

*"Nice atmosphere, good discussions, the teacher is very good."*

*"Good teacher, I like to meet new people"*

*"I like to practice speaking in a group, to make a conversation and to have a discussion"*

## ESOL Entry Level 3

*"I am satisfied with the course because it helps me a lot."*

*"I think the content of the course is developing my writing and speaking."*

*"Content of the course can help me with speaking well and using grammar to make sentences."*

*"A lot of new words, excellent grammar, building sentences. English needed for talking, reading and writing."*

*"This course is good for me - all good talking, reading and exercises."*

*"It's really helpful for us to improve our English and help us to find a job too."*

*"I like that there is a certificate and qualification at the end."*

## Improving Your English Skills

*"I feel that I have improved my English especially in my ability to write and express my views"*

*"Definitely recommend to all. Great place and great people. Mr. Murphy has been amazing"*

*"I felt towards the end I wanted to quit as I was not ready due to my life being very rough. The tutor would not allow me to as he encouraged me to do it as he knew I could. Now I am doing well!"*

*"The strength of the course is a friendly tutor and good delivery of the lessons but I am so missing tea breaks."*



# Testimony Questionnaires

## How did you feel before you started First Steps Women Centre?

Before I started my ESOL in First Steps Women Centre I was lacking in confidence to speak English because I had very poor English and the Centre is a great place to improve my English skills.

The centre is such a lovely place to come to First Steps Women Centre. The Staff here are so friendly. I didn't know anyone in First Steps Women Centre before I started my English class. The child care is an excellent place with friendly staff. I would highly recommend the Centre to people who may want to take up any courses in the Centre. The Bus Driver is also such as professional and friendly man. I was little bit nervous when I started but now I really enjoy learning English because the tutor Una is excellent.

## How did you feel during the programme?

I came to the Women Centre at the right time and it is the right place for me - I learned a lot of very valuable information with an excellent teacher of course. I thoroughly enjoyed this course. The class - venue, number of students in one class and the teacher were all excellent.

## How did you feel after the programme/course finished?

I feel happy that now I am more confident and able to speak English well and I have made many friends from different countries and learned about different cultures of course and also my child has many friends in the Child Care Centre. I have also learnt a lot of new things from the staff. I hope in the future I can get a better job or a new job.

## How did you feel before you started First Steps Women Centre?

I came to the Centre because I was told by another Romanian girl who was learning here about it. I felt nervous at first as I was the only Romanian girl in my class but now I feel good about coming into the Centre. I had learnt a little English before but I knew that I needed to learn more. I came in at Entry Level 2. I really love that there is childcare at the Centre. I have 2 kids and both of them attended the creche and were very happy there and they learnt English and could socialize with the other children.

## How did you feel during the programme?

The centre is a very comfortable environment. The staff are really good and kind. It is just like college but with a creche. Sometimes I would like to do even more exercises in English as I am faster than some girls in the class and I even do more homework. The tutor Una is very good and makes me want to learn more. Every day I go to class I learn more new things and I have recently done my Speaking & Listening exam which I passed.

## How did you feel after the programme/course finished?

I want to continue at the Centre if I can to learn more English. In my own country I trained to be a Pharmacy Assistant but in Northern Ireland I work Part-time in a care home for the elderly. To work as a Pharmacy Assistant Full-time I would need to have better English to work with customers. However, my kids are still small so I would like to continue to learn English until they are older and I can work longer hours. I really miss the centre and the people and learning English and would love to go back. I would really recommend it to others.

# Information Technology

In March 2020 FSWC had to cease all programmes and courses at the Centre due to the rise and spread of Covid-19. Staff had to commence a new way of working i.e. from home.

As a result no IT classes were run from April to June. When staff returned in July preparations were made and put in place to ensure that FSWC would be prepared to provide online classes if the pandemic began to spread again. It was FSWC's intention not be caught out again. September saw the return of students to the Centre but it was agreed that all IT classes would operate online via Zoom. This suited some and for others it was difficult to juggle between caring, home schooling and other demands on their time. It proved to be a wise decision. FSWC had once again to close in January 2021 due to Covid-19. This did not impact on the IT programme as all classes were based online.

From September 2020 to March 2021 eight courses were provided with 54 participants. There was a 100% pass rate in the Sage Accounts & Payroll. This was an amazing result.

## THE CLOTHWORKERS' FOUNDATION

In November 2020 First Steps Women's Centre was awarded £9,900. This was to set up an IT Lending Library for women and their families who were struggling with IT equipment. FSWC purchased 10 Laptops and 8 Tablets (by end of March 2021) for this project. These have been used during the 2021 "Lockdown" to assist women attending our online programmes. It is the intention of FSWC to purchase additional Tablets so that families will be able to have additional IT equipment to help with the education of women and their families.



### Special Thanks to a Wonderful Tutor

One of the main reasons for the success and retention of our IT programmes, not only this year but over past number of years has been down to Patricia Hynds. Patricia is our IT Tutor. She is a caring, genuine person who has went so many extra miles for those women attending the Centre and also for helping and assisting FSWC staff and former students. She has been at the heart of many of the positive things that has happened at FSWC.



# Testimonials

## LEARN TO ZOOM

*"Able to do from home and still feel part of the group."*

*"Being able to connect with other people from home, while learning to use new software"*

*"I loved the calm relaxing atmosphere that Patricia created for us all ---- she is sooooo patient!"*

*"Relaxed learning environment"*

*"Patricia is excellent and most of all patient"*

## SOCIAL MEDIA

*"Loved the course, opened up a whole new world to me using social media"*

*"Excellent course - provided very useful information on various social media platforms e.g. Facebook, Instagram, twitter etc. Also enjoyed shopping sites. Patricia very adaptable to meeting participants needs."*

*"I liked the relaxed style of delivery and the fact that there were no expectations from the trainer which put us all at ease"*

*"Everyone participated fully in each session and Patricia was always more than happy to address our queries and concerns and give more appropriate and sound advice"*

## SAGE ACCOUNTS

*"I am so delighted I was able to complete the course from home. Patricia was helpful and resourceful and I really hope to get an opportunity to learn from her again"*

*"Online was great, however I know the facilities are great from attending centre previously"*

*"Course was easy to understand due to the effort put in by Patricia. She has a great way to explain to let me understand and complete the course"*

## SAGE PAYROLL

*"I loved being able to participate in the course. I feel more confident and able to perform better in my place of work."*

*"Online was great as meant we could work away at home in our own time as we had the software on our own laptops. If at centre it would have just been once a week."*

## MICROSOFT OFFICE

*"Doing from home was easier than I thought great support from everyone"*

*"Using a shared screen where you could actually see the tutor doing changes on an active document."*

*"Learning much more up to date information for Microsoft Office"*

*"The ease of doing it via Zoom and support given"*

*"Tutor was very knowledgeable and always willing to help when asked"*

# Health & Wellbeing

Covid-19 has had a major impact on the service delivery of the Wellbeing programmes. 15 courses have run in this period. The average courses during the past three years was 28. Almost a 50% drop in courses held.

Year	Number of Courses
2020-21	15
2019-20	29
2018-19	23
2017-18	32

## COURSES:

- 1 Confidence course
- 1 Building Resilience course
- 1 Leading Life to the Full course (delivered by Aware)
- 1 Managing Stress in Lockdown course
- 1 Mindfulness course
- 2 Yoga courses
- 2 Pilates courses
- 1 Dancing class
- 2 Tone at Home courses
- 1 Hormone Harmony course
- 1 Access Your Positivity Palette course
- 1 Emotion Freedom Technique & Breathwork Course

## Going Online

Zoom enabled wellbeing to offer a wider range of courses after Christmas as we were not restricted by room availability or size.

Going online has helped some women to become more proficient using ICT. This has increased some women's confidence and also helped reduce isolation as they have gone on to use zoom with family and friends.

Going online also opened the courses up to those who would normally struggle to come in to the centre be that for physical health, mental health, transport, distance or women who were working but could do a class in their break. These ladies wouldn't have been able to attend otherwise.

Going online increased some tutor's confidence levels in regards to using this as a platform to teach both in FSWC and in their own training businesses.

STATISTICS	2021	2020
Retention Rate	72%	80%
Places accepted (where person attended at least one class)	127	383
Average attendance per course	8	13
Average attendance per session	6	10

## Reasons for Leaving Course Early

- 1 multiple Covid isolations within the family preventing attendance.
- 1 relying on transport from someone who was isolating.
- 9 unknown - 2 a referral from another agency
- 1 family commitments changed during course
- 2 mental health challenges
- 1 health related and operation
- 1 poor broadband and also electricity issues.
- 1 Home-schooling made it impossible to attend
- 1 work patterns unpredictable and changing making it difficult to attend
- 4 the course was not for them
- 1 due to family illness followed by return to work
- 2 Didn't want to continue on Zoom

## Reasons for not Accepting a Place

When the Centre was opened between September and December many did not attend due to self-isolating or staying at home to protect themselves and/or loved ones.

From Jan onwards, many declined a place due to home schooling, lack of ICT skills, wanting something in person not online, a decline in mental health, poor broadband.





# Testimonials

## HOW TO BOUNCE BACK

*"I still have down days but can handle it better"*

*"I enjoyed the course it helped me to reevaluate things. I had something to look forward to and learnt new things. It was good to hear others views."*

*"As I struggle with extreme limited energy I found the zoom sessions much more manageable for me than having to attend FSWC in person. I found the group very easy to relate to and share in openly. Nora has an excellent encouraging and manner"*

## YOGA

*"As someone living alone the social interaction is very beneficial. The exercise and relaxation are also extremely good for helping my physical and mental wellbeing."*

*"The yoga class was amazing in that with my chronic condition I've not been able to partake in any form of exercise but with Madelein's class she made it more do able for me and all participants. I enjoyed it and intend to continue with the next course"*

## PILATES

*"Great course really helped me concentrate on me for a change. An hour a week me time to support my wellbeing"*

*"I was initially very unsure if I would be able to manage the technology to access the course as this was my first attempt at an online course and zoom. Over the subsequent weeks I felt much more confident with it and felt a great sense of achievement."*

*This in turn helped in improving my morale and confidence as I began to feel more at ease managing the technology and also being part of the group and getting to know new people. I began to see progress in my flexibility and ability to manage the Pilates moves which boosted my feeling of wellbeing and positivity. The tuition. was excellent. Thank you."*

## DANCING YOUR WAY TO HEALTH & HAPPINESS

*"I loved my teacher she is brilliant at what she does you come away feeling energized and happy as she is fun and full of happiness!"*

## EFT & BREATHWORK

*"The workshop was excellent. Had a very relaxing calming effect. Thank you and thanks to Madeleine"*

*"I found each session helpful. I have started physio and the breathing techniques that Madeleine taught us were what I needed. I have been practising every day and can see already how it can help with pain control and anxiety"*

## BUILDING SELF CONFIDENCE

*"Yes, as these strange times have knocked my confidence and increased my stress levels. This course helps you to look at different things better"*

*"Again, more of these courses on a regular basis. For me it is vital for my mental health"*

## ACCESSING YOUR CREATIVITY PALETTE

*"The course was amazing"*

*"The course was very informative and thoroughly enjoyable"*

## LIVING LIFE TO THE FULL

*"This course has given me the building blocks to become a happier person and not let things bother me as much"*

*"It was an enjoyable experience and mixing with other people was great at this time"*



# Childcare

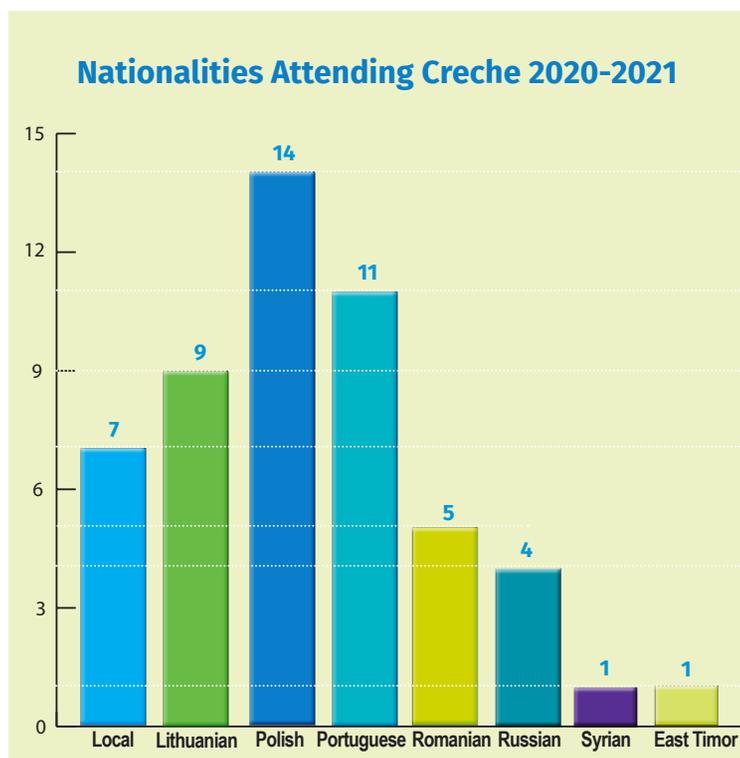
As with all aspects of FSWC during 2020-21 our Creche has been a little bit different. From April to mid July 2020 there was no creche at the Centre. The Centre also had to close due to Covid-19 from January to March 2021. Despite these closures the role and work of our creche and staff continued.

During these periods of lockdown staff operated using the online platform Zoom. This was not the same as face to face work but it was a very good substitute. Staff kept in contact with our parents/children through a number of ways, including phone calls, texts, emails, weekly live zoom sessions, house visits (at the door only), Facebook private group and videos. It has been a challenge for staff, they have had to adapt to a new working environment from home. Staff have learnt new skills and have had to look at new and fun ways to interact with parents/children.

When the Centre did reopen in September there were 18 children in attendance. For the first time 100% of these children were from a migrant background.

During the year there were 89 enrolments with 70 children attending.

This year there has been 8 migrant nationalities plus local children. They include Romanian, Russian, Portuguese, Polish, Lithuanian, Timor, and Syrian.



## Attendance

The enrolment process was slightly different this time round, most parents who were enrolling completed the registration forms at home. Some however needed assistance and this was carried out by staff. The Covid-19 Pandemic meant that the Centre closed from mid-March to July 2020.

## Reggio Emilia Programme

At FSWC Creche, the Reggio Emilia approach to learning is used and promoted. The approach is very much child-led. This means that children are responsible for deciding what to learn.

The Reggio Emilia Approach is innovative and inspiring to early childhood education which values the child as strong, capable and resilient; rich with wonder and knowledge. Every child brings with them deep curiosity and potential and this innate curiosity drives their interest to understand their world and their place within it.

FSWC staff use provocation which simply mean provoke thoughts, discussions, questions, interests, creativity and ideas. Provocations can also expand on a thought, project, idea and interest.

Topics staff used with the children this year were based around the children's ages/and stages of development. Also based on children's interests and capabilities, some topics included 'All about Me', 'Let's Recycle', 'Maths is Fun', 'Our Five Senses and 'Our Community'.

FSWC continue to use 'The Rhyme challenge' and this is proving to be popular and a useful learning tool. All parents are happy with the challenge and continue to teach their children rhymes at home with a new rhyme each month. Rhymes this year included 'Mary had a little lamb', 'Humpty Dumpty', and 'Five Currant Buns'. Staff have had to be creative this year and deliver this programme online. Staff were singing the months rhyme every week on our live zoom sessions using props as a guide.

'Group Time' is still incorporated into our daily routine, and is seen to be the most important time of the day. At the beginning of every session (and through our zoom sessions) each child is welcomed through song. Makaton signs are used at this point during repeated songs, the staff and children love to learn easy Makaton signs. Children are taught the days of the week, counting and

now we have included the ‘I’ve got a Body’ song which teaches the children and all the parts of the body in a fun and interactive way. This particular song gets children and staff up and moving.

### Staff Training Record

It is important that staff continue to learn and develop their own skills and to keep up to date with essential training. During Lockdown staff were able to complete courses virtually. There were a number of relevant courses available from many reliable sources. The main site of course was through the Southern Childcare Partnership.

The training that staff have undertaken this year include:

- Level 5 Childcare Management and Leadership Course (completed by two members of staff)
- Health and Safety/Manual Handling/Risk Assessment Training x3
- Full Safeguarding Training x2
- Equal opportunities
- Paediatric First Aid x2 members
- Food & Safety Level 2
- Autism Awareness
- Autism and Anxiety Course
- Autism and Sensory Processing Course
- Introducing Woodwork in Early Childhood Education
- Emotional Intelligence for Grown-ups
- Anaphylaxes and Epi-Pen Training x3
- Level 2 ACE and Trauma Sensitive Training x3
- Intensive Interaction Introduction Course
- Nutrition Matters for the Early Years
- Solihull Approach in Early Years
- Mental Health
- Psychological First Aid
- Music and the seven areas of learning for babies and toddlers
- The Flourishing Child
- Positive Mental Health
- Principles of Fire Safety



### Parent Evaluations

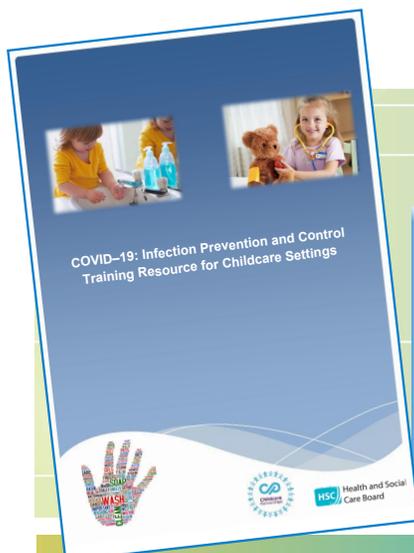
Staff are always interested in the opinions and suggestions of our parents/carers. Evaluations help staff to maintain the professional service they provide. Staff conduct annual one-to-one meetings with parents once a year and also carry out parent evaluations twice a year, one in November and one in March. Unfortunately, due to the Coronavirus staff were unable to conduct the March evaluation. Staff conducted a parent evaluation in November 2020. There were 26 evaluations distributed and 24 were returned. The results were excellent with positive feedback.

### Policies and Procedures

Every year, on the advice of Social Services and Early Years, FSWC’s Creche reviews and amends, as necessary, our policies and procedures. A new COVID-19 Risk Assessment was put in place, and was effective immediately when the Centre reopened in July 2020.

The following policies were updated:

- Health and Safety Policy
- Safeguarding Children Policy
- Admissions, settling in and attendance Policy
- Children with additional needs policy
- Children’s daily arrival, collection and non-collection procedure,
- E-safety, networking and mobile phone policy
- Intimate personal care Policy
- Parental Partnership and consent policy



## Testimonials

*“The staff support parents and teach my child new things.”*

*“The Staff are very friendly, kind, helpful and calming.”*

*“The staff maintain good communication with me, I always know what my son has done in creche.”*

# Information Officer

## Website Visits



### Facebook Likes

From April 2020 to March 2021 our average likes have risen from 2140- 2398 (+258) = an average increase of 21 likes per month



### Website Visits

Average monthly visit over the 12 month period - 817 (last year's figure - 749)



### Twitter

April 1st 20120 - March 31st 2021

Impressions	1.393k
Tweets	6
Profile visits	47
Mentions	5



### Instagram

FSWC joined Instagram in February 2019

No of Posts	147
New Followers	88
New Following	47

## Searching FSWC on Google (Google My Business)

Saw on Google - 7380

Asked for directions - 16

Telephoned - 241

Visit Website - 324



## Course Promotion & recruitment

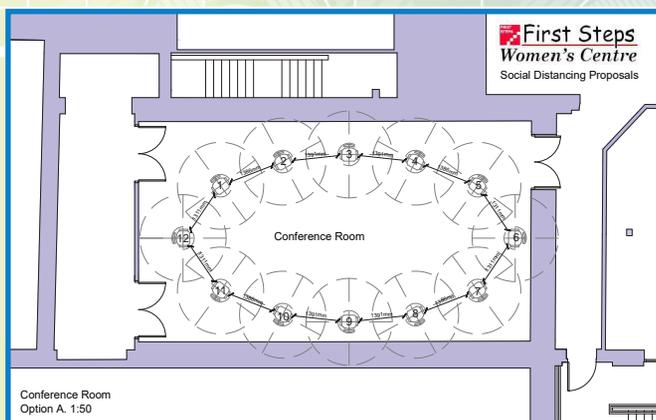
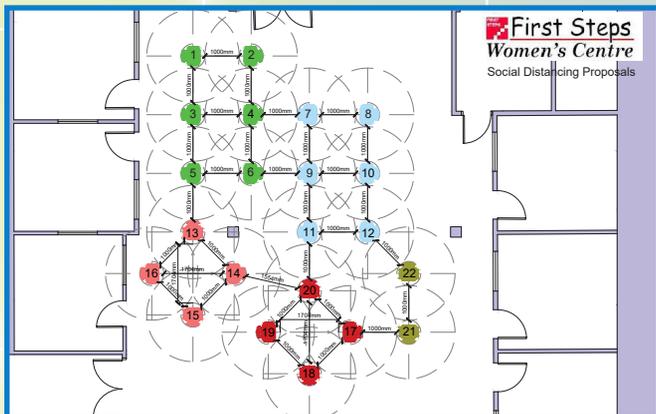
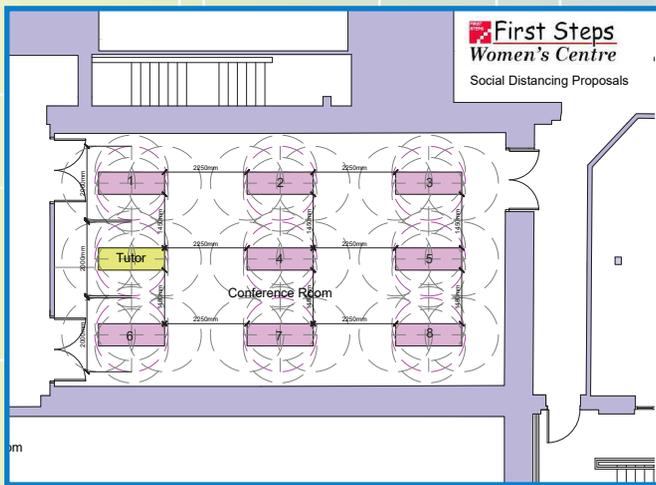
2020 has been a year like no other! A deadly virus called COVID-19 swept through the world causing a global pandemic. Businesses, shops and schools all had to experience total lockdown from 23rd March 2020. As well as affecting the students who were attending classes at our Centre, this had a massive impact on our promotional work. FSWC would normally be preparing for the summer promotion in supermarkets and designing/ordering/printing our new leaflets for distribution to the public. Instead FSWC adopted online technology, social media and lots of marketing emails to help recruit for the autumn programmes in 2020

In addition to the lack of supermarket promotions, the Centre was unable to organise Open Days, Coffee Mornings, Annual Quiz and our Christmas and International Women's Day events. FSWC continued to use our Social Media platforms to post information which would be of interest to help during the lockdown period, e.g. updates on COVID-19, healthy recipes, ideas for home schooling, ideas and information around keeping fit, positive affirmations, etc. Our Childcare Leader Helena made some lovely videos about washing your hands and reading stories to the children which were posted for the Mums and children. Videos and photo collages were also posted to provide a welcome boost to keep the women informed about FSWC.

New procedures were put in place for the re-opening in September. Hand sanitizers were placed in Reception and before entering the main area, all doors were propped open, social distancing posters were displayed throughout the building, only 3 people were allowed in the bathroom at any one time. Staff were allocated times and rooms to clean after class ended and students had vacated the building. A video was compiled showing the new procedures and posted on social media to reassure all who attend the Centre that FSWC was a safe place.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 positive cases and death rate continued to rise over the Christmas period and as a result we entered into a second lockdown in January 2021. To maintain contact with the Mums and Children who attend our Centre, we created a Childcare Facebook Group. Childcare staff have been doing a great job posting videos, projects and home-schooling information online. Going forward it seems that social distancing and facemasks are here to stay for at least the short term. We are putting alternative advertising and promotion in place for the 2021 term.

# COVID-19 Adjustments & Preparation including plans for social distance



# Benefit Checker

Despite the lockdown First Steps Women's Centre has been very busy with its Benefit Checker service. Over £77,000 in additional benefit has been identified with the service reaching 232 people.

Sex	No.	Portugal	Lithuania	Brazil	Slovakia	Timor-Leste	NI/UK	Bulgaria
Female	50	9	1	2		5	32	1
Male	8	2			1		5	

01.04.2020 to 31.03.2021	
New clients	58
Cancelled	18
No. of forms completed	89
Amount of successful entitlement	£77,722.48
Returning clients	174
Time spent on telephone enquiries (hrs)	41
Time spent in 1-to-1 interviews (hrs)	136
Telephone calls with clients	72

Employment Status	Number
Employed	30
Unemployed	2
In Training/Education	5
Retired	7
Looking after family	8
Unable to work due to ill health	6

Age Group	Number
16-24	5
25-40	17
41-60	10
61+	5

Referred By	Number
Police	2
FSWC	25
Friend	28
BCM	1
Women's Aid	2

## Testimonials

*"Gillian is always at the end of the telephone for a chat, when I need her advice or just a listening ear. She is never judgemental, always understanding and very approachable"*

*"I like that when I go into class that I see Gillian and Ingrid's smiling happy faces, they make me feel very welcome and are genuinely interested in how I am. If I am feeling down, they put a smile on my face and set me up for the day; it means an awful lot to me and makes it easier"*

*"FSWC is a great place; it is my sanctuary from life, family and social media. I can turn off for a few hours every week"*

## Martin Lewis Charity Fund

### First Steps Women's Centre during the Pandemic

The whole world was affected by Covid-19 and the ensuing pandemic. Many of the world's major economic drivers went into a downward spiral e.g. Travel, Tourism, Hospitality, Engineering. The affect of isolation due to the pandemic meant a massive reduction in income for households and families.

First Steps Women's Centre received some funding from Martin Lewis Coronavirus Charity Fund. This was to help with emergencies and provide families with a stop gap until they received support from government agencies.

### Partnership Work

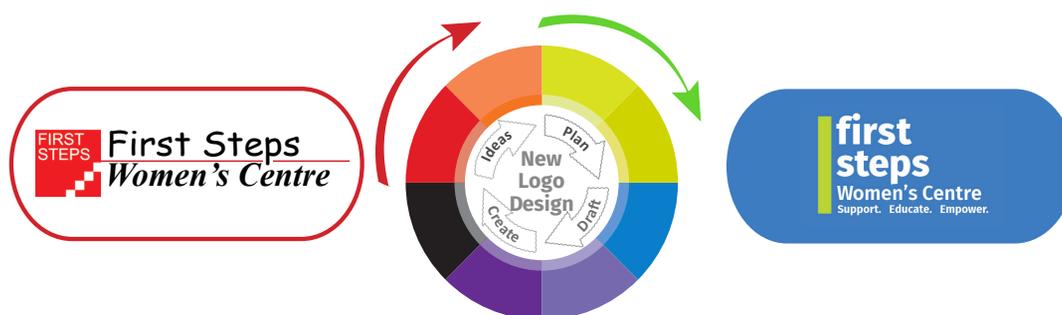
As a result of the Martin Lewis funding FSWC was able to financially support Dungannon St Vincent de Paul, Vineyard Church, Dungannon & Coalisland Surestart and local Educational Welfare section of ESNI.

This support included vouchers for local supermarkets including Lidl, Sainsbury and Newell Stores. The total amount distributed during this year was £6,995.

# Logo and Website Redesign

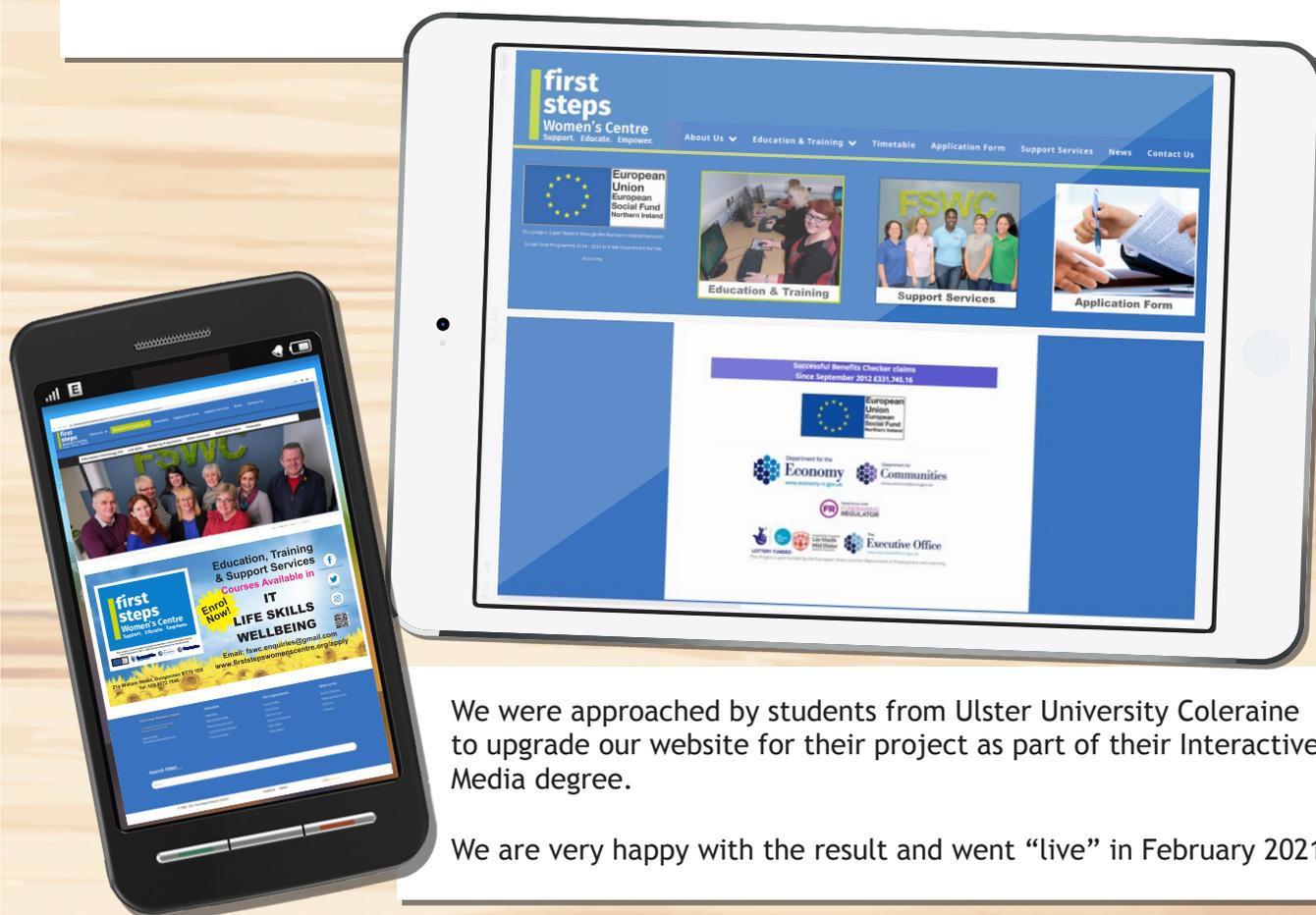
## Partnership with University Ulster

First Steps Women's Centre has developed links with UU during the past 18 months. Prior to the pandemic and lockdown the aim was for the University to provide some outreach programmes at FSWC in September 2020. Unfortunately the outbreak of Covid-19 scuppered these plans. However, University of Ulster invited FSWC to put a proposal into the University's Science Shop. The Science Shop is a community-engaged research and learning resource for community and voluntary partners across Northern Ireland. The Science Shop acts as a broker identifying students from a relevant subject discipline to do complete the project as part of their University coursework.



## Updating Website and Change of Logo

FSWC applied to the Science Shop seeking a review of its website and also a new design for its logo. As you can see from the logo, the outcome was excellent. FSWC were very, very pleased to have three students work on the new designs for our website and also what they created as our new logo. Thank you University Ulster for all your hard work, dedication and artistic flair.



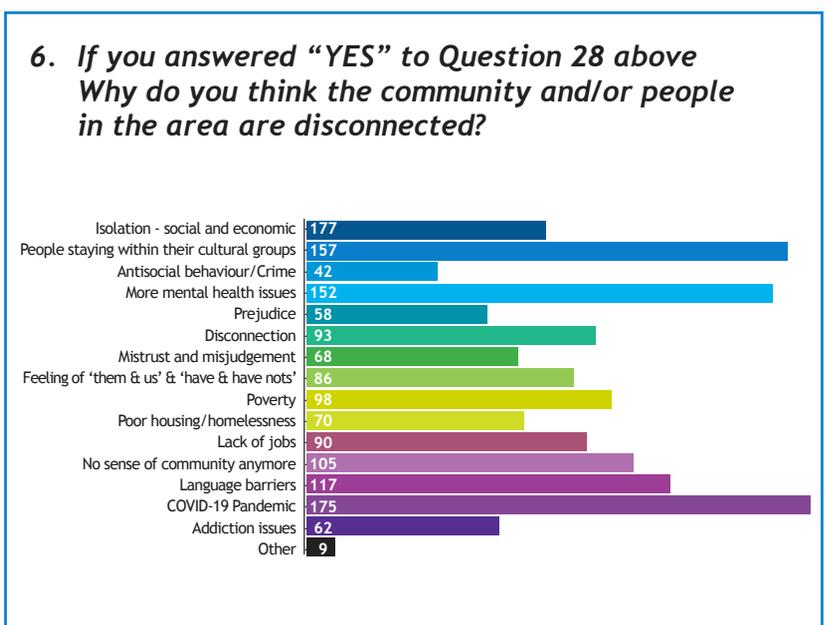
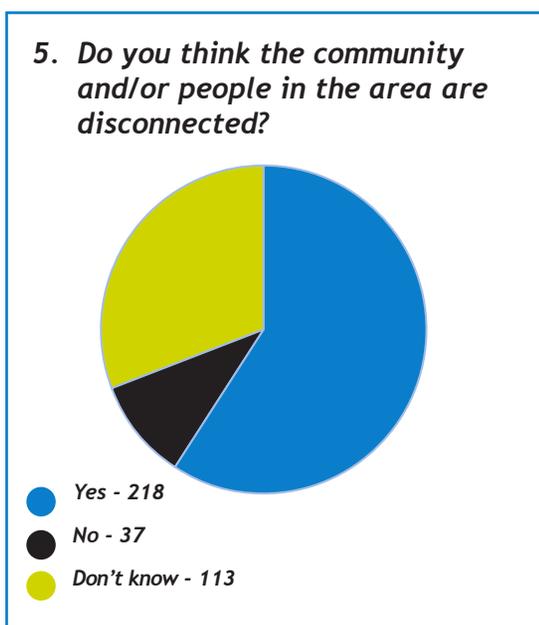
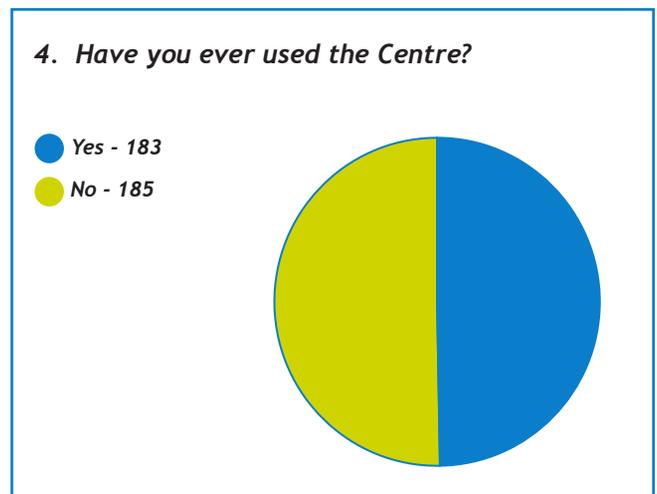
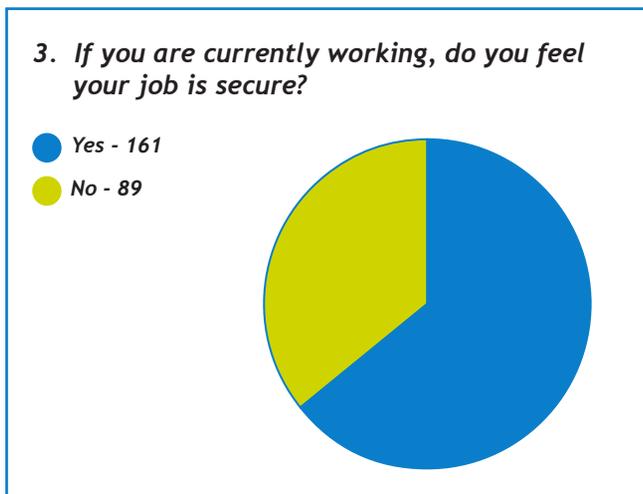
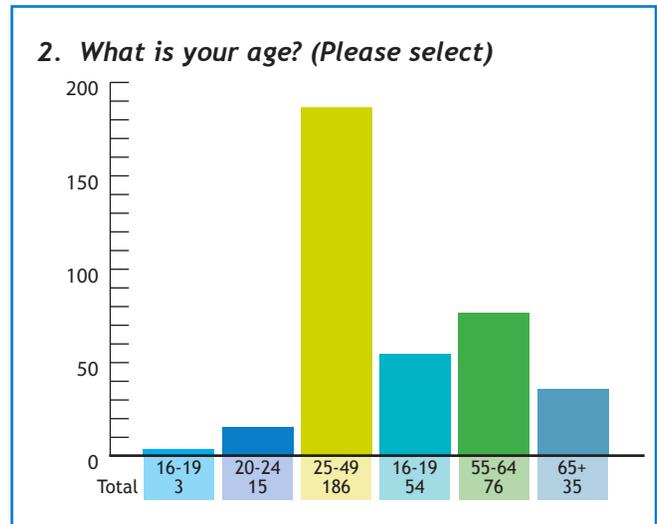
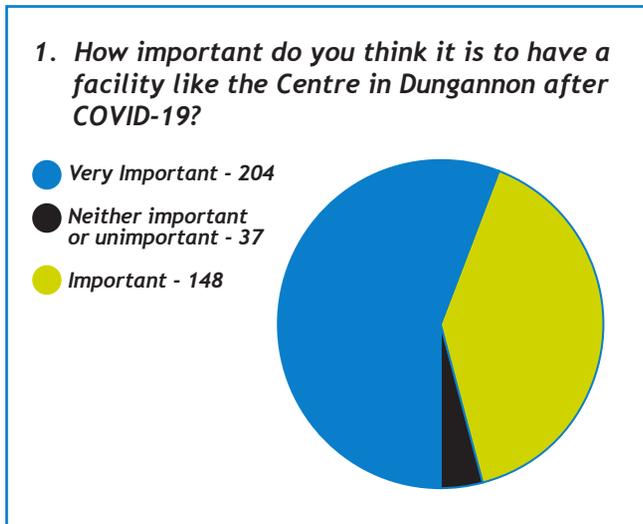
We were approached by students from Ulster University Coleraine to upgrade our website for their project as part of their Interactive Media degree.

We are very happy with the result and went "live" in February 2021!

# First Steps Women's Centre Covid-19 Community Survey Jan-Feb 2021

There were a number of reasons for this consultation. FSWC sought to find out how people were coping during the pandemic and second lockdown. FSWC also wanted to know from the Mid Ulster community whether or not they felt a disconnect within their area and also whether they would use FSWC. FSWC also asked what they would like to do at FSWC. The results were quite illuminating. There were 369 replies, of which 70 (19%) were from the local migrant community.

Some of the data and replies have been reproduced below.



## **“A Volunteers Experience of FSWC” by Theresa Boyle**



I began volunteering at First Steps Women’s Centre (FSWC) in September 2017. At the time, I had just graduated from university and was interested in pursuing Counselling. I had enrolled on a course at Southern Regional College and they encouraged finding a volunteer position in a place where counselling was provided. The subsequent search was initially unsuccessful, but for a chance meeting in the Oak Centre with two staff members of FSWC doing the Centre’s annual promotion. Unfortunately FSWC no longer had an on-site counsellor by that point, but I decided to take up a volunteer position anyway. I haven’t regretted it!

When I arrived at FSWC, it would be generous to say I was short of confidence. I’ve struggled with anxiety for most of my life, and long-term illness had only worsened my isolation and natural shyness. I didn’t find it easy to interact with people and when I learned that most of my duties would involve just that, I was terrified!

Over the last three-and-a-half years, things have definitely changed. At first, I volunteered one morning a week, primarily answering the phone and operating the photocopier. In September 2018, that evolved to two days a week (when I decided that counselling wasn’t for me), and my role grew too. I’ve helped out in Finance, ESOL classes, and the Crèche; took over the Job Board; and become something of an unofficial statistician. I’ve attended a Building Self-Confidence course in the Centre, and, last year, I qualified as an ESL teacher.

Besides my growth in confidence, the other huge benefit to being in the Centre is the lovely and amazingly supportive staff. For the first time in my life, I feel included, part of a team, part of something. That’s how I imagine the women who attend our Centre feel - maybe they’re nervous at first, maybe they’re even scared, but if they feel even one iota of the warmth and support I’ve felt over the past three-and-a-half years, they’re definitely in the right place!

Volunteering during COVID-19 has been an adjustment. I miss being in the Centre, I miss seeing everyone on a regular basis, I miss us all sitting around the table with a cup of tea. During this time, I’ve been focused on doing whatever I can to help, mostly via deliveries from Franco (Minibus driver). Over the past three months, I have even been sitting in on ESOL Zoom classes to provide individual support.

I hope we can get back to some semblance of normality soon and, when we do, I can’t wait to have a cup of tea with everyone!

## **Crafty Young Things**

Crafty Young Things was set up in 2015. They are made up of mostly elderly ladies who meet at FSWC every Friday. The group would usually share craft skills, including knitting, sewing and crochet. The group would then make a lovely lunch, and sit down for a chat and a cup of coffee. However, due to the COVID-19 restrictions, Crafty Young Things were unable to meet during this year. So instead FSWC went to them.

At Christmas, we delivered a little Christmas light up bauble with their initials on it. All of the women were happy to have someone call at their door with a wee surprise and gift. For many, this was the first time anyone had called at their house. At Easter, a planted flower pot along with an Easter Egg was delivered to their doorstep. Again, this was received with delight.

The women from Crafty Young Things have really missed their Fridays at FSWC. The staff have as well. The ladies from Crafty Young Things always include the staff for Friday lunch!



## **Testimonials**

*“Delighted with my Easter card and Easter Gifts; thank you so much to the Staff of FSWC.”*

*“Lovely gifts much appreciated; cannot wait till the centre reopens and we are back on a Friday.”*

## Income from charitable activities

	<b>Restricted Funds 2021</b>	<b>Restricted Funds 2020</b>
	£	£
European Social Fund / Department for Economy	275,297	270,312
PBNI	720	-
BBC Children in Need	5,000	10,000
The Hickinbotham Charitable Trust	1,000	-
Enkalon Foundation	500	-
The 29th May 1961 Charitable Trust	3,000	-
Garfield Weston Foundation	25,000	-
The Clothworkers Foundation	601	-
Mid Ulster District Council	5,000	5,000
Mid Ulster District Council	1,526	-
CIF - Match Funding: Department for Communities	32,375	32,375
Department for Communities - WCCF	36,464	36,464
CIF - Non Match Funding Department for Communities	24,423	24,423
Dfc - Prep for Work	2,829	2,737
Small amount written off	- 79	- 94
The Pathway Fund	15,000	-
Co-op Ireland	1,724	-
Dungannon Credit Union	400	-
AMAZON/FSWC Royalties	54	-
Martin Lewis Covid 19 Fund	7,500	-
CrowdFunder	609	-
Cash for Kids	980	-
Clear Project	4,680	-
Awards for All	10,000	-
TEO (MEDF)	-	9,991
SHCT - SCCP	-	720
TEO (GR)	-	21,001
Halifax Foundation For NI	8,500	4,500
CFNI	-	1,000
LBS	1,000	796
The American Ireland Fund	-	4,215
Department of Health	3,799	-
BOI - CFNI/ PY CFNI Tampon TAX	4,397	-
Donnelly Bros	-	800
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>472,300</b>	<b>424,240</b>

### Analysis of expenditure on charitable activities

	<b>Total</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2020</b>
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
Wages and salaries	256,084	256,084	251,153
Staff training and recruitment	4,338	4,338	3,416
Staff T&S /Expenses	88	88	1,217
Course Expenses and tutor fees	33,907	33,907	56,067
Exam Fees	6,881	6,881	-
Volunteer Expenses	590	590	1,730
Interpreter Services	-	-	60
Participant comfort expenses	29	29	1,933
Participant Training & Course Materials	969	969	303
Rent and water rates	4,614	4,614	16,730
Insurance	3,892	3,892	2,426
Light and heat	5,664	5,664	5,682
Repairs and maintenance	5,069	5,069	3,793
Leasing rentals/Small Equipment Purchase	1,719	1,719	1,177
IT support	2,718	2,718	5,324
Printing, postage and stationery	1,840	1,840	4,266
Advertising	1,853	1,853	2,536
Telephone	3,059	3,059	2,708
Creche Equipment	1,824	1,824	3,055
Motor expenses	1,606	1,606	2,891
Participant Travel	447	447	1,557
Interpreting Costs	74	74	-
Subscriptions	346	346	394
Accreditation Fees Application	500	500	500
Health and Safety	-	-	402
Emergency Assistance	4,690	4,690	1,190
General expenses	-	-	34
Donations to other Charities	1,800	1,800	100
Misc Expenses	155	155	-
Depreciation of tangible assets	38,821	38,821	40,439
Disposal of assets	-	-	348
Governance costs (see note 10)	2,400	2,400	2,413
Support costs (see note 10)	55,455	55,455	54,988
<b>Total</b>	<b>441,431</b>	<b>441,431</b>	<b>468,892</b>

Expenditure on charitable activities 2021 totalled £449,455 which was all restricted.

Expenditure on charitable activities 2020 totalled £468,892 which was all restricted.

## Statement of Financial Position (balance sheet) as at 31 March 2021

	Note	2021 £	2020 £
<b>Fixed assets</b>			
Tangible assets	13	407,118	436,258
<b>Total Fixed Assets</b>		<b>407,118</b>	<b>436,258</b>
<b>Current assets</b>			
Debtors	14	29,009	79,708
Cash at bank and in hand		287,649	151,694
<b>Total Current Assets</b>		<b>316,658</b>	<b>231,402</b>
<b>Liabilities</b>			
Creditors falling due within one year	15	4,276	2,680
<b>Net Current assets</b>		<b>312,382</b>	<b>228,722</b>
<b>Net assets</b>		<b>719,500</b>	<b>664,980</b>
<b>The funds of the charity:</b>			
Unrestricted income funds	16	132,781	122,793
Designated Reserves	16	100,000	100,000
Restricted income funds	17	486,719	442,187
<b>Total charity funds</b>		<b>719,500</b>	<b>664,980</b>

# Funders





First Steps Women's Centre  
21a William Street  
Dungannon  
BT70 1DX  
028 8772 7648

Email: [fswc.enquiries@gmail.com](mailto:fswc.enquiries@gmail.com)  
[www.firststepswomenscentre.org](http://www.firststepswomenscentre.org)

 [firststepswomenscentre](https://www.facebook.com/firststepswomenscentre)

 [@FSWC](https://twitter.com/FSWC)

 [firststepswomens](https://www.instagram.com/firststepswomens)